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## Instant Meals Add Plenty Of Time For Strife In Kitchen

By Monte Noelke

MERTZON — The introduction of bakery bread to the Shortgrass Country some 60 odd years ago marked the opening of a new epoch. No other innovation has brought such a dramatic change to the inhabitants of this area.

From that day on marital disputes of exceptional ferocity have raged around the issue of cold stoves versus hot ones. To the very time of this writing, serious outbreaks occur nearly every day. Peaceful settlement is nowhere in sight.

As biscuit cutters and bread pans grew rusty, charges on both sides have become more bitter. The women, triumphantly claiming that the trend toward non-cookery was a liberation from bondage, delivered orations that would touch critics of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The husbands contended glumly that if the fad weren't halted, stomachs of future generations would require treatment with enzymes taken from the digestive systems of anteaters.

The arrival of frozen TV dinners and frosty pre-steamed squash has escalated the quarrel to a higher pitch. Now it's so bad that marriage experts won't even comment on the issue.

As much as I hate to incriminate my brothers, the big obstacle in settling the fight has to be blamed on the men. They flat refuse to give commercially prepared foods a chance. Inherent prejudices and preconceived notions even keep them from appreciating how hard old Colonel So-and-So has worked to bring his plantation — spawned recipes to freezers of the Southwest. The same applies to the entire field of instant cookery.

Take the case of packaged sandwich meat. Great quantities of imitation sliced ham and sausage are daily snatched from the bins of the area's stores. A "C" student in her first six weeks of home economics knows that such food is nourishing, chock full of proteins, cereals and some meat. Nor does it take a college trained kitchen efficiency expert to tell you that cold cuts save hours of work in milady's kitchen. To make the food more tempting, the manufacturers have spent years learning to blend in special dyes to make it more appetizing to the consumer.

But 999 out of 1000 male Shortgrassers denounce packaged meat as the poorest substitute for food since the ancient people of the Nile River quit eating dried water bugs. The old penny pinchers say that paying 60 cents for a six-ounce package of compressed meat is as foolish as inviting the Audubon Society to a \$100-a-plate dinner featuring blackbird pie.

It is in their complaints about price that they stray farthest from the truth.

Granted, \$1.80 per pound is a bit high for a pound of packer bull laced with oatmeal and wrapped in a plastic casing. Yet when you consider that both the labels and the plastic wrapping will make a sandwich just as tasty as the contents thereof, the cost is reduced considerably.

As a matter of fact, many smart housewives have learned that after their family has eaten cold meats for an extended period, the grocery sack itself could be included in the menu without anyone noticing the difference.

Frozen dinners are under the same stigma, as far as he-Shortgrassers are concerned. Most of the male citizenry (I'd guess about 99.66 percent) contend that the fare on the bottom deck of the old time slave galleys was superior to these aluminum plattered concoctions of limp chicken or wilted beef garnished with two-year-old green peas.

A very high percentage of Shortgrass men come right out and say they'd prefer returning to the old Indian way of existing on yucca stems and skunk berries than suffering slow death on frost bitten, aluminum-flavored preparations. Some of the local critics go completely wild. They have the nerve to claim that TV dinners will give you a kind of malignant lumbago that destroys the body so badly that a veteran undertaker can't fit the pieces back together. Others scream that eating off aluminum platters will cause a vision impairment worse than acute sunblindness.

A few of the more sensible residents scoff, saying that frozen dinners at worst can cause nothing more serious than complete emotional breakdown.

In reality, all their complaints are without foundation. Any reputable person who has tasted a frozen dinner knows that no one will ever eat enough of one to harm his health. Verbal attacks against instant tea, pre-roasted radishes and powdered potatoes are equally baseless.

Nevertheless, the battle of the kitchen goes on. Its settlement will require one of two available alternatives: Either the men must be educated to eat ready-cooked grub, or they must be starved into submission.

For the time being, the latter seems to be the most practicable solution.